

State Representative

Linda Lawson

The 2000 Session of the Indiana Legislature



How To Reach
Representative
Linda Lawson

RESIDENCE

29 Detroit St.
Hammond, IN 46320

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE

House of Representatives
200 W. Washington St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2786
1-800-382-9842
Hl1@ai.org

WEB SITE
www.state.in.us/R1

Spring, 2000

Dear Friends,

The 2000 session of the Indiana General Assembly ended on March 3.

We passed several significant pieces of legislation, including a plan to distribute the funds Indiana will receive from the tobacco settlement and a proposal to increase benefits for workers severely injured on the job. We also adjusted the unemployment compensation system, making improvements for both workers and employers.

I have detailed several new laws in this newsletter and have included some other information that you might find useful.

In the coming months, I will be working on interim study committees. Study committees allow legislators the opportunity to explore subjects in greater depth than is permitted during the session.

Please contact my office at 1-800-382-9842 if you have questions or concerns regarding state government.



Sincerely,

E-mail updates available on state legislative issues

Several people have indicated to me that they would like to receive e-mail updates on legislative issues and other issues important to our district. I am pleased to offer this service through my legislative office.

Simply e-mail or call my office and I will add you to this list. I am excited about the technological advances over the past few years that allow you nearly instant access to legislative news and information.

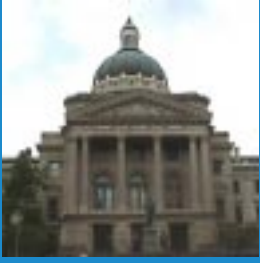
Inside this newsletter

Tobacco Settlement

**Helping Working
Families**

School Safety





Session News

School safety

School buses will be required to display the school or school district and its corresponding number on the back and top of the vehicles. This new requirement will make it easier to identify school buses and students in an emergency. In the case of an overturned school bus, officials will be able to identify the bus and find out where it is from in order to notify parents and locate medical information on students.

National concern about school safety played a role in passage of legislation that allows school security plans to remain confidential. The legislation also provides that school boards may meet in private to discuss the assessment, design and implementation of school safety and security measures.

We also enacted legislation that stiffens the penalties for speeding violations near a school to a Class B infraction. The maximum penalty for this offense is \$1,000.

Legislature allocates tobacco funds

Bi-partisan agreement help several programs and groups

Certainly one of the biggest achievements of the 2000 legislative session was passage of legislation that sets up a system to allocate the more than \$4 billion Indiana will be receiving from the national tobacco settlement over the next 25 years. The funds will go to health care services, tobacco prevention programs and assistance for senior citizens on lower incomes who have trouble purchasing prescription drugs.

The final bill was the result of many months of work by legislators on both sides of the aisle. From the start, we have attempted to assure that most of the funding goes to health care and efforts to reduce the use of tobacco products.

In the first year alone, \$35 million will be dedicated toward health care programs, with an emphasis on tobacco education and prevention. Another \$20 million will be used to help seniors on low incomes purchase needed prescription drugs. Community health centers will receive \$15 million in program support, along with a one-time-only appropriation of \$10 million to make physical improvements to facilities.

This is a considerable accomplishment for a short session of the Legislature, and it is a tribute to the willingness of officials to set aside partisan differences in order to pass bills that will have long-term benefits for the people of our state.

Senior citizens will also see benefits

Senior citizens on lower incomes should not have to choose between buying food to eat or the prescription drugs they need to remain healthy. Thanks to the legislation allocating money from the national tobacco settlement, they won't have to make that decision.

The final bill includes \$20 million to help low income seniors purchase prescription drugs. From my visits around the district, this is one of the most pressing concerns among older Hoosiers.

Census 2000

The results of Census 2000 will impact millions of dollars in federal funding for the State of Indiana. Indiana's population is estimated to be around 6 million -- up from 5.5 million in 1990 (the last official U.S. Bureau of Census count).

Census Facts & Figures

- Census officials estimate that they missed more than 8.8 million people in 1990, mostly children, minorities and the poor.
- Four in 10 households did not return the census forms sent by the government in 1990.

You should have already received your form in the mail. The results will be used to determine federal funding for roads, schools, hospitals, services for the elderly and many other local needs.

To make sure everyone is included, census workers will distribute forms to people who live in group settings, such as universities and colleges, nursing homes, transitional shelters, correctional institutions, and halfway houses.

Census information **cannot** be shared with others, including Immigration and Naturalization Services, welfare services, Internal Revenue Service, police, courts and the military.

Be counted --- complete and return your form today!

Helping working men and women

Workers, unemployment compensation benefits increased

Legislators have approved measures that will make substantial changes in coverage for workers who are injured on the job and improve benefits for those people who have lost their jobs.

Around 90 percent of Indiana workers who receive a disabling injury in a workplace accident will see their compensation increase close to 50 percent. There are improvements in the one-time cash payments made to a person who suffers a permanent partial impairment in a workplace accident. The change will help any worker determined to have up to the 30th degree of impairment, which includes around 90 percent of all injured employees. Weekly disability payments also will increase.

Indiana workers who lose their jobs will see unemployment compensation increase by 33 percent over the next three years. The maximum benefit will increase from \$252 to \$336 by July 2002. To finance the increase, the state will use a larger share of the unemployment trust fund, a move that will cut premium payments by employers by nearly \$80 million the next two years.



Rep. Lawson discusses legislation with Rep. Jonathan Weinzapfel (D-St. Philip).

Tax cuts greater than expected

\$210 million in savings for taxpayers

Inventory tax cuts enacted by members of the Indiana General Assembly will provide more relief than originally anticipated for farm and small business owners across the state.

When we passed these cuts during the 1999 legislative session, savings were estimated at more than \$80 million in both 2000 and 2001. Now it appears those estimates were low, and the actual savings will be more than \$210 million in both years. This news means that many Hoosiers will see even smaller tax bills in the years ahead.

In the 1999 session, legislators approved a plan that provided a credit for property taxes paid on the first \$12,500 of assessed valuation on personal property, including inventory, mobile homes and farm and manufacturing equipment.

By enacting this credit and assuring it covers both equipment and inventory, we eliminated inventory taxes for nearly 90 percent of the businesses and farms in Indiana. The inventory tax cut is just one part of what is now more than \$1.5 billion in tax relief for the people of Indiana that has been put in place over the past few years.

Other reductions approved during that time provide a new income tax deduction for homeowners that covers up to \$2,500 in property taxes, raise the exemption for dependent children from \$1,000 to \$2,500, increase the renter's deduction from \$1,500 to \$2,000, eliminate the property tax add-back for farmers and small businesses and put two breaks in place that benefit senior citizens: raising the income tax deduction from \$1,000 to \$1,500 and the property tax deduction from \$1,000 to \$2,000.



Insurance

I am pleased to announce that legislation enacted this session will go a long way to increasing insurance coverage for a number of individuals.

One change involving dental health maintenance organizations will mandate that licensed dentists be in charge of making decisions about dental claims.

Other legislation requires HMOs to cover patients for colorectal cancer testing based on standards established by the American Cancer Society. People found to be morbidly obese will receive coverage for necessary treatment, including surgery.

Medicaid

Currently, Indiana requires that a person suffer from a life-long disability in order to receive Medicaid Disability assistance. The General Assembly approved legislation that would replace the life-long requirement with a four-year disability requirement.

Indiana has the most restrictive Medicaid Disability definition in the nation. Forty-eight other states require that a person suffer from a disability for one year. New Hampshire is the only other state which requires a four-year disability.



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Rep. Linda Lawson

200 W. Washington St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2786

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1-800-382-9842

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to my e-mail update group*

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State legislative web site

The state web site provides a great deal of information about state government, the legislative process and other related items. The main site at www.state.in.us offers a nice starting point to explore government in Indiana.

From that starting point, you can visit the home pages of elected state officials and state agencies. In addition, several premium services are available for a monthly fee.

I encourage you to visit my web site at www.state.in.us/R1 and explore various items related to the legislature.

A new feature on my web site will allow you to request various House publications. We currently offer publications specifically designed for senior citizens, grade-school children, and high school students in the process of choosing a college. Other publications give a general overview of various Indiana state agencies, offer a guide to women's health and advise how to avoid being the victim of a scam. There is also a booklet available which details every bill that became law during this year's legislative session.

You may also request booklets by calling my legislative office at 1-800-382-9842.

Top Five State Web Sites*

1. State Job Bank
www.state.in.us/jobs/jobbank.html
2. Hoosier Lottery Homepage
www.state.in.us/hoosierlottery
3. Attorney General's Unclaimed Property Search
www.state.in.us/attorneygeneral
4. General Assembly homepage
www.state.in.us/legislative
5. Dept. of Environmental Management homepage
www.state.in.us/idem

*Based on number of visitors as of February 25, 2000